

Commencement Address
Ohio State University
20 March 1958

THE CHALLENGE OF ABUNDANCE

President Fawcett, members of the faculty, distinguished guests, proud parents - members of the graduating class of March, 1958.

My pleasure at being here today is tempered by the practical realization that the normal commencement audience "will little note nor long remember" what we say here. For this, as well as other reasons, you may expect brevity. But a commencement like this does present an opportunity for sober discussion and appraisal of the future with intelligent and privileged young men and women who can, if they will, help to shape that future. I accepted President Fawcett's invitation to speak to you today because of my faith that most of you do want to help - and ultimately will help - to solve the difficult problems facing this nation.

Among the books I have had on my night table in the past months is one by Henry Kissinger entitled "Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy." The first few lines of the first chapter of that book pose the immediate dilemma in which we find ourselves these days. Let me quote them for you. "In Greek mythology, the gods sometimes punished man by fulfilling his wishes too completely. It has remained for the nuclear age to experience the full irony of that penalty. Throughout history, man has suffered from a shortage of power and has concentrated all of his efforts on developing

new sources and applications of it. It would have seemed unbelievable even fifty years ago that there could ever be an excess of power; that everything would depend on our ability to use it subtly and with discrimination. Yet this is precisely the challenge of the nuclear age."

Then, speaking particularly of the military use of that power, Kissinger says further - "Ever since the end of the second World War brought us not the peace we so earnestly sought, but an uneasy armistice - we have responded by what can best be described as a flight into technology; by devising ever more fearful weapons. The more powerful the weapons, however, the greater becomes the reluctance to use them." Thus it is, that with our military strength at an all-time peak, because of our reluctance to use that strength, we are having great difficulty in dealing effectively with what we believe to be Communist-inspired aggressions. And our reluctance is a practical one. The result of an all out conflict between two great adversaries - Russia and the United States - can only be the substantial destruction of both and a portion of the balance of mankind as well.

Thinking about those words of Kissinger's, relating in the first instance to the explosive power contained in the atom, I began to turn over in my mind other examples of the abundance which we, in this country, have achieved - and then to question the effectiveness with which we have been using that abundance. Let me cite a few examples and then suggest the meaning which this challenge of abundance has for each of you.

We know that, in addition to the abundance of explosive power we now have available for use anywhere in the world, we have a potential

abundance of power for peaceful purposes from the same basic source. The nuclear materials, now used principally in weapons, can be utilized to provide energy sources for the generation of electric power or the supplying of process heat in almost limitless quantity. Although less than immediately useful to industry in the United States because of our abundant supply of relatively low cost conventional fuels, the development of this new resource for export to industrially-oriented but underdeveloped nations could be a most potent instrument of foreign policy.

No nation has had as much practical experience in the development of atomic energy as we have had. Instead of getting on with this job, however, we find ourselves frittering our energies away in a public power versus private power debate which is preventing the full utilization of our technological resources in the development of the peaceful uses of atomic energy.

On another front, we possess, in abundant quantity, food supplies which continue to glut government warehouses and storage centers. In an attempt both to decrease production and to protect the farmer from excessive marketing losses, subsidies are being paid under the soil bank plan or the price support program - or both. And still the surpluses grow larger as our agricultural methods are improved and the gods of wind and weather are beneficent. I suppose it is true that this is the only nation in human history where large numbers of people worry about what not to eat rather than about acquiring the minimum amount of food necessary to sustain life. Somehow, in this world where so many people are starving and malnutrition hinders the progress of nations, some better solution to this

problem of mal-distribution of food must be found.

Perhaps these are the most important and basic commodities of which our abundance could be turned to constructive uses for the benefit of mankind generally. But we do possess, in abundant quantity, many other things - less important, to be sure - but still the result of a creative energy and an industrial capacity as yet unequalled in any other country. We design, manufacture and distribute more widely to all of our citizens than anywhere else in this world the material gadgets that seem so common to all of us - the automobiles, the radios and TV sets, the washers and driers, the refrigerators - you name them, and a very great percentage of our families have them! But have they brought us the real satisfactions that they might represent - the leisure to read and think, a real sense of well-being and accomplishment and the time and desire to do for others? Or have they simply helped to make us the envy of other peoples while we struggle to keep our economy producing them at an ever increasing rate?

In a no less real sense, we now possess, in abundant quantity responsibility for the provision of leadership - the world over - in maintaining an uneasy peace - or if you prefer Kissinger's phrasing - an uneasy armistice. Like the development of our abundance of energy, our abundance of food and our abundance of material things, these responsibilities have come to us swiftly. Indeed, they have come so swiftly that we, as a people, are poorly prepared to live with them and to discharge them in such a way that the world is rid of some of the causes for tension and strife that erupt into so-called brush fire wars or police actions with disturbing regularity. Accustomed to the security provided over the past centuries by

our comparative isolation from potentially powerful adversaries, we have had little need, and thus little inclination, to understand the basic philosophies and the strengths and the weaknesses of the people of other nations. Now, in a few short years, we find the world's troubles deposited on our doorstep.

There is an urgent need for us to acquire an abundance of understanding in this matter of dealing with the lives and the economies of other nations.

There is an urgent need, it seems to me, for finding ways, within our democratic framework, of utilizing our abundance in resources of energy, of food, and of ingenuity and capability in industrial production to assist in meeting the abundance of responsibility we have for world leadership. If we can put the same quality of effort into such a program as we seem to be able to muster whenever a market for a new gadget appears, we will come closer to matching our statements about our belief in the dignity and freedom of the individual with meaningful action. Our abundant resources may well be more powerful weapons for waging the battle for peace than the nuclear weapons we now possess. The latter we must continue to build and hold in readiness as a part of diplomatic negotiating strength - the former may well be the trump cards in the game, if wisely played. Certainly we have little to lose - and much to gain - in adding these resources to our arsenal in the cold war. And I am convinced that our national conscience - that composite of the beliefs and fundamental desires of the great majority of our citizens - will, if aroused, dictate such a program as a practical answer to the nuclear weapons stalemate.

If these statements have meaning for you of the younger generation at the outset of your careers, it is simply this - - that the coin of abundance always has two sides. Abundance of power carries with it responsibility for service to mankind; abundance of creature comforts carries the implicit obligation to share our well-being; abundance of leisure is inexorably joined to intelligent use of our free time. The obverse of the currency of our nation's riches in all areas of life is always stamped "responsibility" or "obligation." You have earned and will accept this afternoon the privileges of an academic degree. With those privileges go the responsibilities of the educated man and woman. And while there will always be those who thoughtlessly squander the privileges our society bestows upon them, you cannot - - if you consider yourselves members of the company of educated men - - join those who would waste this heritage of riches.

It seems to be a generally accepted statistic that the college graduate will earn, on the average, at least \$125,000 more during his lifetime than the high school graduate. This is a measure that all of us can understand and is too often the only measure used in evaluating the worth of a college education. I would suggest that a more meaningful measure can be the extent to which you utilize your acquired specialized talents for the benefit of your fellow men.

There is one currency of which no society possesses an over abundance. That is specialized talent - persons with skills, educational backgrounds and experience which set them apart as potential leaders and opinion makers in their nation. The degree you accept today entitles you

to membership in this group of people possessing specialized talents. You have paid the initiation fee - four or more years of educational effort beyond the high school level. The fee which will entitle you to continuing membership will be your growing interest and participation in the affairs of which we have been speaking. And it is the intelligent handling of these affairs which will determine the kind of world your children will inhabit.

In most instances your chance to serve will involve you in the affairs of your local schools or your church, perhaps in some community governmental or research project. These efforts will be made as an addition to your regular job of making a living. But in increasing measure, there is need for well educated and capable people to devote their full energies to the affairs of government and education. These two professions, at all levels, hold the dominant position in the shaping of the destiny of our nation and of the world community of nations. From my experience in each, I can testify that both hold interest, excitement and the real satisfactions for the participant.

Having said at the outset that this would be a sober discussion, I want to bring it to a close on an optimistic note. Working with young people like yourselves everyday may bring a few headaches to the college administrator, but one cannot be pessimistic about the future of a nation peopled with the young men and women now attending our colleges and universities. The desire to know seems to be more frequently coupled with the desire to understand than was the case in my college days.

An increasing awareness of the fact that we share this world with other human beings and that other nations have challenged us successfully in fields where we have believed ourselves unbeatable has begun to engender in all of us a greater measure of humility. With this has begun to appear a conviction that hard work and the application of all of our talents must be employed if we are to meet the responsibilities we face. It will be a great adventure - with high stakes. May you face it with courage, enthusiasm and the faith that men of good will must prevail ultimately in the quest for peace.